



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

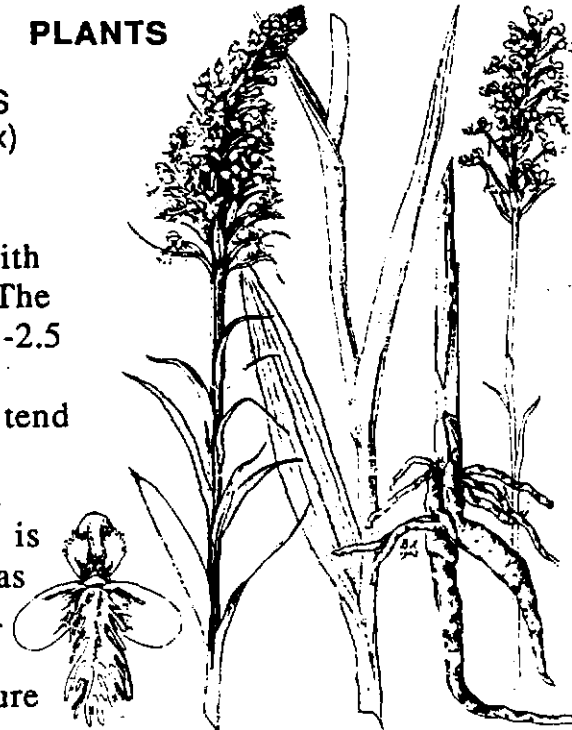
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135
Westborough, MA 01581
(508) 792-7270 ext. 200

MASSACHUSETTS ENDANGERED PLANTS

CRESTED FRINGED ORCHIS (*Platanthera cristata* Michaux)

Description

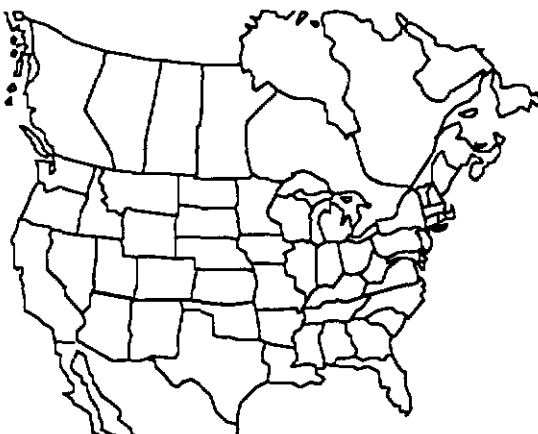
Crested Fringed Orchis is a wand-like, hairless plant with fleshy roots, measuring 12-24 inches (30-60 cm) tall. The two to four lower stem leaves are narrow (.4-1 inch, 1-2.5 cm wide), long (2.8-8.4 inches, 7-21 cm), and pointed. Upper leaves are much smaller than lower leaves and tend to hug the stem. The flower cluster (inflorescence) is compact, measuring 1.2-4.7 inches (3-12 cm) long, and about 1.2 inches (3 cm) in diameter. The inflorescence is densely flowered and forms a spike-like raceme with as many as eighty small orange flowers per inflorescence. Petals are shallowly fringed around the margin and project over the sepals. The spur, an elongated structure containing nectar, is very short and slender. Flowering season in Massachusetts is throughout the month of August.



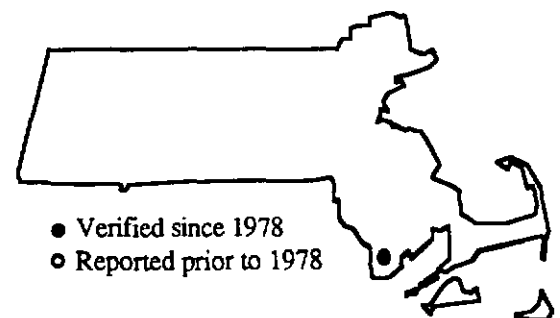
Correll, D.S. Native Orchids of
North America: North of Mexico
Stanford University Press.

Similar Species

The White Fringed Orchis (*P. blephariglottis*) has a flower similar to the Crested Fringed Orchis except in color. The Orange Fringed Orchis (*P. ciliaris*) is larger than the Crested Fringed Orchis and has a broader, less compact, and often proportionately shorter raceme of flowers which may be greater than twice the size of the latter and which are much more deeply fringed.



Range of Crested Fringed Orchis



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

Habitat in Massachusetts

Crested Fringed Orchis is usually found in moist acidic soil in bogs, wet meadows, swamps, and depressions in pinelands. The one verified occurrence in Massachusetts is found in narrow sedge-grass wetlands in old stabilized dunes. Surrounding prominent plants include rushes, irises, Cross-leaved Milkwort, Goldenrods, and Marsh Fern. Others include asters, Slough Grass, Cranberry, and Canada Reed Grass. Typical surrounding edge shrubs are Swamp Azalea, Viburnum, Maleberry, and Sheep Laurel.

Range

Crested Fringed Orchis is found from southeastern Massachusetts to Tennessee and Arkansas, south to central Florida and along the Gulf Coast to Texas.

Population Status

Crested Fringed Orchis is listed as "Endangered" in Massachusetts. There has been one recent (since 1978) verified occurrence and there have been two historical (before 1978) occurrences. All of these were found in southern Bristol County. The Crested Fringed Orchis is also considered rare in Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. Probable threats to the Orchis include competition from the overgrowth of shrubs and disturbance from pedestrian traffic.